

SB 72 AN ACT CONCERNING NOTIFICATION OF SUPPORT FOR FOSTER PARENTS AND RELATIVE CAREGIVERS

Good Morning, Representative Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, members of the Select Committee for Children. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in Support of SB 72 An Act Concerning A Notification of Support for Foster Parents and Relative Caregivers.

My name is Karen Coton, I am a former foster parent. I believe this bill is necessary because foster parents and relative caregivers need more support in the vital role they play for the children in their care. I have a ten year old daughter; her adoption was finalized over five years ago after fostering her for four years.

During her time in foster care I was constantly seeking extra help and support. It was a very difficult and confusing process. We were never given notices of court hearings; when her biological sister lived with us she was removed due to a psychiatric diagnosis. It took months to get her into therapy and once she was diagnosed I found out she had been given the same diagnosis the previous year, we were never told and she went a year without treatment.

Last year we fostered a teenager we personally knew, she was 18 , a senior in high school and had already been admitted into a local university. She is a very bright, vibrant young woman.

I received a text message from her a few weeks before Christmas of 2014. She told me her foster mother could no longer let her stay due to medical problems. She asked if she could live with us. My husband and I cared very much for her and we were excited to have her.

When we moved her in we changed our home for her, my daughter gave up her bedroom voluntarily so she could have the bigger bedroom. We bought new bedroom furniture and accessories. We wanted to let her know she was part of the family and it was her house too.

Our support worker at the time said she hoped we were told her history and how many placements she had.

As any teenager would do, she would sometimes test our rules and boundaries, but overall we had no serious problems. She was a typical teenage girl; she had a lot of

friends, and a busy social life. I often told her how impressed I was by her success and determination despite her traumatic childhood.

She stayed with us for approximately four months, my husband and I were completely shocked when she came in one day with a kitten, demanding we allow her to keep it or she was leaving. In previous conversations we told her we could not have a cat, our daughter has serious asthma.

Her whole demeanor changed, it was like a flip switched and she was a complete stranger, not the young lady I'd known since she was 12.

My husband and I did not want her to leave, she gave us an ultimatum, we told her no and she left.

As she walked out the door she quipped, "You have no idea how many people I have done this to."

When I told her caseworker what happened, she said she was not surprised. This young lady has a history of giving unreasonable demands and ultimatums to foster parents then leaving when they refuse. She then seeks out another family and asks to be taken in and continues the cycle.

Had I known she had this past history I would have had therapy be a condition for her to move in with us. Since she was 18 she may have declined but that would have been her choice.

When I talk to foster parents about their experiences I often hear the same complaints. They are not given information about the children's past history.

Most of these kids need therapy and it can be very difficult to get the children the services they need.

Foster parents are also reluctant to share experiences from fear of retaliation. Foster parents repeatedly tell me they would like to be involved, but do not want to risk losing kids in their care, or no longer being asked to take kids into their care.

Foster and relative caregivers play vital roles in the lives of the children. They should be informed about the children in their care and valued for what they do. There should be no fear involved about questioning a placement or airing a grievance.

